

Shifting Geo-politics in the Greater South Asia Region

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This paper discusses and explains the South Asia region, which, depending on how you define it, is home to some 1.7 billion people. It also points to some future challenges and possibilities for this important region. Geographically, South Asia comprises the Indian subcontinent and its immediate surrounds. However, apart from geography and some shared history, there is little that encourages, or compels, the South Asia region to cohere. Based on membership of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the regional organization that represents South Asian nations, South Asia comprises (in alphabetical order): Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Like all geo-political regions, however, South Asia is neither neat nor precise: all South Asian nations have connections with neighboring regions. Afghanistan straddles Central Asia and Southwest Asia, plus it has a connection with Northeast Asia via a short border with China. Bhutan, India and Nepal have connections with Northeast Asia by virtue of their common borders with Chinese-controlled Tibet (Xizang). The Maldives is actually located in the Indian Ocean, with whose small island nations, such as Mauritius and Seychelles, the Maldives seemingly has more in common. Similarly, Sri Lanka is located in the Indian Ocean, although the submerged Adam's Bridge physically links this island to the Indian subcontinent. Pakistan has a physical connection with Southwest Asia via its border with Iran. Finally, India and Bangladesh have connections with Southeast Asia as a result of their land borders with Myanmar (which the United States officially calls "Burma"). Furthermore, India could well be considered part of Southeast Asia because of its possession of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which offshore territory is located significantly closer to Myanmar and Thailand than to India.

Additionally, the influence of religious and ethnic factors does not make South Asia a concise region. While some South Asians are adherents of indigenous religions, chiefly Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, others are followers of religions that have come, or been brought, to South Asia from external locations. Consequently, Islam connects many South Asian nations with Southwest Asia, particularly to Saudi Arabia for all Muslims, but also to Iran for Shia Muslims, such as Hazaras in Afghanistan and Indian Shias, who may comprise the world's second largest Shia population. The populations of Bangladesh, the Maldives and Pakistan overwhelmingly comprise Muslims, but Hindu-dominant India also has a considerable Muslim minority which, to the chagrin of some Indians, is increasing. Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka all have Christian minorities and concomitant external connections. Christians actually comprise the majority population in three northeastern Indian states: Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram. Some nations overwhelmingly are Buddhist (Bhutan, Sri Lanka) or have Buddhist connections (India, historically, through Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha obtained enlightenment) or Buddhist minorities (Nepal). One of India's great challenges is managing the presence of a vocal Tibetan Buddhist community led by the Dalai Lama, a politico-religious figure with international standing and popularity whose physical presence in India since 1959 China has disliked. (Beijing fears that the Dalai Lama will be reborn in the Tawang area of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh that China claims and refers to as "South Tibet.")²

South Asia also has some significant ethnic overlaps and connections. Afghanistan and Pakistan have large populations of Pushtoos/Pukhtoos who straddle their border—a border imposed on Afghanistan by the British that Kabul grudgingly accepts. To its north, Afghanistan shares populations of Turkmen, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kirghiz with neighboring

Central Asian states. Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan have ethnic Baloch minorities. Pakistan itself houses some 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees, which is “still the largest protracted refugee population globally.”³ Sri Lanka’s minority Tamil community is connected with ethnic Tamils who populate the adjacent Indian state of Tamil Nadu, a circumstance that makes some in Sri Lanka’s majority Sinhala community feel insecure. In the open India-Nepal border areas, Indian Biharis and hill people respectively are similar to Nepali Madhesis and Paharis. There is a Nepali minority in Bhutan. In northeastern India, Nagas and other tribals are ethnically similar to people living in Myanmar. Conversely, hardline Myanmarese consider ethnic Rohingyas to be “Bengalis” from Bangladesh. Less contentiously, Bengalis certainly populate the Indian state of West Bengal and the nation of Bangladesh (the “Land of the Banglas”, or Bengalis). Similarly, ethnic Punjabis populate states in India and Pakistan that are both called “Punjab” and which once were unified under British rule of India. In 1947, these departing British divided—or partitioned—the populous provinces of Bengal and Punjab, and the other areas of the subcontinent that they directly administered, on the basis of religion. Muslim majority areas became East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) and West Pakistan; non-Muslim majority areas remained as India. This provoked a massive upheaval, particularly in Punjab, as fearful people fled, or they were encouraged to flee, to their nation of choice: Muslims to Pakistan; Hindus and Sikhs to India. As many as ten million people migrated; up to one million people may have been killed during this cataclysm.

Historically, all South Asian nations share a link to British colonialism (*see Appendix 1 on page 6*). Areas that came to comprise the nations of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) were ruled directly or indirectly by the British. Bhutan and the Maldives were British protectorates. The British did not directly control Afghanistan and Nepal, but they did heavily influence both nations, essentially controlling their defence and foreign policies. Three significant factors have resulted

from this British domination. First, the term “South Asia” is a post-colonial construction that Western geo-strategic analysts have invented as a way to describe what before was, directly or indirectly, essentially the British Empire. Second, English is the *lingua franca* or link language used throughout South Asia. No other common language exists that enables South Asians to readily communicate with each other. Third, the British imposed many of the borders that South Asian nations now share. The British finally left this region in 1965 after they granted independence to the Maldives—although they did retain a strategically important territory further south called the British Indian Ocean Territory (sometimes called Diego Garcia) on which they allow an ongoing, and significant, U.S. military presence. Since 1965, some further changes in international borders have taken place. Pakistan obtained ten percent of the Rann of Kutch from India as a result of international arbitration in 1968. Shortly after, however, Pakistan itself was dismembered when it lost “its” eastern wing as a result of the Bengalis’/Banglas’ successful creation of Bangladesh in 1971. In 2015, India and Bangladesh swapped 51 Bangladeshi territorial enclaves in India and 111 Indian territorial enclaves in Bangladesh, a process that affected 50,000 people.⁴ Fairly extensively, however, the international borders between the eight nations of South Asia are British creations.

Apart from geo-ethnic differences, South Asia is a fractious region. This is why I listed the various South Asian nations in SAARC above alphabetically. To do otherwise may cause angst. It may also suggest that one nation in South Asia is superior to another—which is actually the case, as the physical and socio-economic disparities in South Asia confirm (*see Appendix 2*). At one extreme, India is both very large and the world’s second most populous nation; at the other extreme, the Maldives is tiny, with its population combined with Bhutan’s being less than the population of a moderate-sized India city such as Patna (population 1.37 million). In

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Appendix 1: British colonial links with South Asian nations

All South Asian nations have a direct link with British colonialism. From 1849 to 1947, the British Indian Empire—popularly called “India”—included what we now know as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In 1947, the departing British created two entities, India and Pakistan, by partitioning those areas of India under their direct control: Muslim-majority areas became Pakistan; the other areas stayed as India. The princely rulers of areas over which the British had indirect control (or paramountcy) could choose to join India or Pakistan. For geographic reasons, most rulers chose India. The Hindu ruler of Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir vacillated, creating an ongoing contest between India and Pakistan for possession of this entity. This is the so-called “Kashmir dispute”.

When Pakistan was created in 1947, it comprised two wings, East and West Pakistan, separated by India. In 1971, ethnic Banglas/Bengalis, the dominant ethnic group in East Pakistan, with Indian Army assistance, won independence for their new nation, Bangladesh. West Pakistan then reverted simply to being Pakistan.

In the Himalayas, the British had a Resident or Envoy in Nepal from 1819-1947. Bhutan was a protectorate from 1907-1947. These arrangements enabled the British to control both kingdoms’ external relations.

In the south, Sri Lanka was a British colony called Ceylon from 1815 to 1948. The Maldives was a British protectorate from 1887 to 1965.

Westwards, the British never directly ruled Afghanistan, although they did fight the Afghans in 1839-42, 1878-80 and 1919. They also controlled Afghanistan’s foreign policy from 1879-1919.

between, South Asia has two nations that are populous in their own right: Pakistan and Bangladesh, which respectively are the world's sixth and eighth most populous nations. Both, however, are often overshadowed by India, which is three times more populous than their combined populations. India is also the largest, most prestigious and economically strongest nation in South Asia. Furthermore, India's economy is growing strongly. Therefore, whether it wants to or not, and much to its neighbors' irritation, India dominates the South Asia region—and its component nations. India's situation is enhanced by a significant geo-strategic advantage: India is at the center of South Asia, with Indian land and maritime borders separating all South Asian nations from each other, except for Afghanistan and Pakistan. This geo-strategic reality means that South Asia is essentially "India-locked:" for non-Indians to access each other, they must either cross Indian territory or meet in third locations away from South Asia. This circumstance is difficult for landlocked nations (Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal), which partially explains the often dysfunctional Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship and why Afghanistan is politically closer to India than Pakistan. Equally, however, because of the distances involved or because of their own weak capabilities and traditions, India's maritime neighbors (Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) also have limited contacts with each other.

Due to these factors, South Asia is an incongruous region. SAARC itself has been largely ineffectual advancing the region politically or economically. Despite the existence of the South Asia Preferential Trading Arrangement and the South Asian Free Trade Area, South Asian nations enjoy little inter-connectivity or inter-regional trade. Indeed, inter-regional trade is "less than 2% of GDP, compared to more than 20% for East Asia."⁵ People-to-people contact also is minimal, as is labor migration (with most foreign remittances coming from South Asian workers located in the Persian Gulf area). There is little sense of people being citizens of South Asia in the

way that diverse people in Europe consider themselves Europeans. Region building is challenging, if only because of the obvious disparities in size and influence between South Asia's nations. SAARC's operating principle of "non-interference in the internal affairs of other States" prevents the discussion of contentious bilateral or multilateral issues.⁶ The parlous state of India-Pakistan relations also have held South Asia back. Fundamentally, neither nation trusts the other, a situation fostered by their bitter, ongoing dispute since 1947 over which should possess the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). This mistrust pervades the region, if only because, diplomatically, both nations have competed relentlessly internationally, as well as in, or over, SAARC. India seeks to ensure that this body does India's bidding—or to prevent the other members from "ganging up" on it.⁷ Pakistan, and other nations, resist India's sometimes heavy-handed attempts to dominate, with Pakistan's ability to withstand India increasingly based around it possessing more and more nuclear weapons. Since being formed in 1985, SAARC summits should have been held annually. In actuality, these have occurred about every 18 months, chiefly because either India or Pakistan has boycotted attending. And when both nations did finally turn up to a summit, they have struggled to engage with the other. At the 18th, and most recent, summit in Kathmandu in November 2014, for example, the prime ministers of India and Pakistan only shook hands at the end of the meeting—and then only briefly.⁸ Otherwise, they did not engage with each other. Given this lack of connectivity, it is not surprising that the South Asia region is weak and underdeveloped.

While lacking coherency, South Asia is nevertheless important. Its population alone makes this region significant: in 2014, there were almost 1.7 billion South Asians. While many of them confront development challenges, each South Asian nation is enjoying some form of democracy and economic growth. These are positive developments as, historically,

South Asia has experienced considerable violence. India and Pakistan fought wars in 1948, 1965, 1971 and 1999 (Kargil). Both nations maintain massive militaries that patrol the Line of Control (LOC) that divides J&K and serve on Siachen Glacier, the highest and most inhospitable battlefield in the world in the northeast area of the disputed former princely state. India and China fought a war in 1962, with many Indians remembering this humiliating loss. In 1971, Banglas/Bengalis, supported by the Indian Army, liberated Bangladesh/East Pakistan from the Pakistan Army. This involved atrocities and considerable deaths. Since 1979, Afghanistan has endured turmoil, with Soviet forces being present from 1979-89, followed by brutal civil war and Taliban rule until 2001, then military intervention by the United States-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from 2001-14. In the early 1990s, India defeated Sikh separatists; Nepal had a Maoist uprising from 1996 to 2006; in 2009, Sri Lanka finally and irrevocably defeated separatist Tamil Tigers. Ongoing insurgencies, active or quiescent, include: separatist Balochis, whose struggle, now in its fifth phase, dates from 1948; an anti-Indian insurgency in Indian J&K that became violent in 1989; Maoists or Naxalites in eastern parts of peninsular India who, in 2009, were regarded as India's "greatest internal security threat;"⁹ insurgencies in northeastern India, one of which—by Nagas—has the dubious honor of being South Asia's longest insurgency, dating from the mid-1950s; and, "fundamentalist" Taliban in northwest Pakistan and southeast Afghanistan seeking to impose or re-impose (for Afghanistan, where the Taliban ruled from 1996 to 2001) a harsh interpretation of Islam. Cross-border "terrorism" has also been a problem that has bedeviled India-Pakistan relations (as well as Bangladesh-India and India-Sri Lanka relations), particularly in Indian J&K, with India and Pakistan almost going to war in the 2000s after terrorists from Pakistan attacked the Indian Parliament in 2001, then Mumbai in 2008. Since then, India-Pakistan relations have fluctuated from poor to freezing. Positively, however, the current overall levels of violence in South Asia due to insurgencies and terrorism are decreasing.

Strategically, South Asia also is important. First (and not in any order), this region sits above a vital sea line of communication along which significant amounts of world trade, including energy, travels from Southwest Asia, via the Malacca Strait, to industrial Northeast Asia. Second, South Asia abuts both China and Central Asia, with both locations able to access the Indian Ocean via Afghanistan, Iran and/or Pakistan. Indeed, for people in far western China, the Indian Ocean is significantly closer than the South China Sea. China also seeks access to the Indian Ocean through Myanmar via the so-called “Irrawaddy Corridor” that stretches from Yunnan to Myanmar ports located on the Bay of Bengal. Third, led by India, the nations of South Asia are developing economically, with one aspect of this being the creation of consuming middle classes. This is encouraging external nations to get involved economically with South Asia, particularly with India. Fourth, South Asia is considered by some to be a “nuclear flashpoint” where an incident could escalate militarily to the point of nuclear weapons being used in a conflict. India and Pakistan both have nuclear capabilities—comprising respectively perhaps 100 and 120 nuclear weapons each. These weapons are now deliverable by long-range ballistic missiles (for India) or medium-range ballistic missiles (for Pakistan, which is seeking to develop or acquire a long-range ballistic missile capability). Both nations are seeking to acquire “second strike capabilities,” including development of nuclear-powered and/or nuclear-armed submarines equipped with ballistic missiles. India needs this capability to defend against China; Pakistan needs it to defend against India. While India is essentially developing its second strike capability indigenously, Pakistan’s ally, China, almost certainly is assisting Pakistan. Fifth, because of their existing nuclear and ballistic capabilities, India and, to a lesser extent, Pakistan now has the ability—although not the intent—to threaten nations located far beyond South Asia. This gives the South Asia region strategic influence that reaches beyond its own geographic and political boundaries.

Significant changes in South Asia

The year 2014 saw some major changes in South Asia. The most significant change was the lessening in importance of the constituent elements of “Af-Pak:” Afghanistan and Pakistan. This resulted from the significant drawdown of forces from ISAF, with this completed on January 1, 2014 when the “Resolute Support Mission” (RSM) superseded ISAF. RSM comprises some 13,000 troops from 42 nations, with the United States providing about half of these troops. Its mission is “to ensure that Afghanistan is never again a safe haven for terrorism.”¹⁰ While an admirable aim, RSM’s support is very high-level: it will “train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces and institutions,” rather than engage directly in military operations. This essentially “hands-off” approach negates the obvious, and pressing, need of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) that increasingly—but not totally successfully—are confronting motivated recidivist Taliban elements, possibly supported by Pakistan, who are reluctant to negotiate and keen to continue to fight. RSM’s creation shows that the West is not “cutting and running”—yet. But its training and advisory role does suggest that the West’s interest in Afghanistan has weakened—and that many Western nations would like to vacate Afghanistan if they could. A major challenge, therefore, for RSM will be to ensure that contributing nations, particularly the U.S., retain interest in the remote and difficult nation of Afghanistan that offers little strategically, but into which quagmire foreign forces may (again) sink. Afghanistan has now endured over thirty-five years of almost perpetual violence and turmoil. With the government in Kabul weak, with the ANDSF greatly challenged, and with the Taliban not fully unified due to a post-Mullah Omar power struggle—not to mention the possible presence of unsavory and rival “Islamic State” elements—it seems unlikely that peace, stability and development will return to Afghanistan in the short term, despite Afghans’ desires for these factors. The poor state of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, which initially improved under the new Ghani Government, also will not help. There are high levels of mistrust

and dislike between Afghans and Pakistanis. This transpires into each nation covertly supporting anti-social elements in the other. Part of the solution in Afghanistan is for Pakistan—and other nearby nations—not to meddle. Whether they can resist doing so seems unlikely.

A further result of the creation of RSM has been that, vicariously, Pakistan has become less important strategically to the West, particularly to the United States. Lacking geographic contiguity to Afghanistan, ISAF depended on being able to transport military supplies and materiel to this nation, chiefly via Pakistan. Indeed, due to poor U.S.-Iran and poor U.S.-Russia relations, Pakistan became indispensable, particularly when ISAF had more than 100,000 troops in Afghanistan. As confirmation of Pakistan's importance, Washington generously gave \$26 billion in military and economic aid—not loans (as China generally does)—to Pakistan since 9/11, 2001.¹¹ This, nevertheless, has not ensured a close or endearing U.S.-Pakistan relationship. Few Americans appear to be genuinely interested in Pakistan; many Pakistanis believe that the U.S. has opportunistically used Pakistan and that it lacks a long-term commitment to their nation. With the U.S. drawdown from Afghanistan, Islamabad now worries not only about its own (decreasing) strategic importance, but also about an unstable post-ISAF Afghanistan in which India and other non-Pakistanis will almost certainly play a part. Pakistani anxieties have increased because Western nations, particularly the U.S., have been strategically wooing Pakistan's eastern neighbor and enemy, India. Pakistan seriously angsts about India, which is one reason why Pakistan chose to disenchant Saudi Arabia by declining to militarily support its chief financial and energy benefactor's actions in Yemen, as this would have reduced Pakistan's ability to defend its eastern front against India. Consequently, feeling insecure, Pakistan has looked elsewhere for solid strategic support, particularly to China, which has obliged. Consequently, China is playing a larger part in both Pakistan, with which it has long had a close relationship, and in Afghanistan, where it is seeing some economic opportunities. Pakistan is seemingly happy with this.

Nevertheless, Pakistan currently confronts many problems that not even China or Chinese money can fix. These include a poor economy, major electricity shortfalls and energy deficiencies, unsettled Baloch elements, violent power struggles in Karachi, uncontrolled population growth, and water shortages. Ruthless sectarianism also is a major problem, particularly among some Sunni and Shia groups. This has provoked the Pakistan Army's latest operation, Operation "Zarb-e-Azb" ("Sharp Strike"; the name of a sword used by Prophet Muhammad), which aims to militarily defeat rampant "Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan" (Taliban Movement of Pakistan) elements located in Pakistan's northwest. The Army's cause was assisted significantly by the Taliban's brutal murder of 141 schoolchildren in Peshawar in December 2014, as a result of which, Pakistan got serious about defeating *all* terrorists. This included ditching the concept of "good" and "bad" Taliban depending on whether such elements were pro- or anti-Pakistan or they were controlled by official Pakistani "elements." A positive addition was the formulation of a 20-point National Action Plan on December 24, 2014. Levels of violence have since decreased in Pakistan, with some 3,600 civilians, security forces and terrorists/insurgents killed in 2015, as against almost 5,500 the previous year.¹²

Added to these problems for Pakistan, however, is a poor, almost non-existent, relationship with India. Indeed, Islamabad is currently confounded by India, which won't deal with Pakistan unless and until it (Pakistan) takes the issue of state-sponsored terrorism seriously. Additionally, Indian forces have been actively, aggressively and belligerently engaging Pakistani forces along the LOC. Pakistan's nervousness is not helped as India obviously gets stronger economically and militarily and more popular diplomatically and internationally, while Pakistan struggles. There are three ramifications to this situation. First, Islamabad will continue to develop a "defensive" nuclear arsenal to counter India's increasing conventional military superiority. Second, Pakistan, a nation seemingly used to double-dealing on the issue of terrorism and terrorists, may revert to using this option against

India. (Until the terrible Peshawar incident, Islamabad seemed to consider its duplicitous behavior normal, acceptable and publicly deniable.) J&K is an obvious target, if only because Kashmiris harbor deep and unresolved disgruntlement with India. In order not to provoke India excessively, however, subversive activities must be kept at a low level, as happened in nearby Gurdaspur, Indian Punjab, in July 2015, when gunmen dressed in army uniforms, possibly Lashkar-e-Taiba operatives, killed eleven people, including three policemen.¹³ This was somewhat replicated when armed militants, possibly Jaish-e-Mohammad operatives, attacked the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot in January 2016. Third, Pakistan will continue to pursue strong relations with China, partly because this gives Pakistan some feeling of security in relation to India, with which China also has some unresolved issues and a difficult relationship. These ramifications are not a recipe for endearing and enduring India-Pakistan relations. Nor will they further South Asia as a region.

Meanwhile, for its part, India has been looking eastwards, not westwards. As a consequence of its “Neighbourhood First” policy, India has engaged with all of its neighbors, except Pakistan. This has resulted in some old and difficult issues being positively resolved, such as the Bangladesh-India maritime border, which the Permanent Court of Arbitration decided in July 2014, and the 2015 swapping of enclaves by India and Bangladesh. It is also leading to some significant new arrangements, such as the multilateral “regional motor vehicle agreement” between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (with membership apparently offered to Pakistan, which declined). This agreement will enable the “movement of both people and goods among the four SAARC member countries.”¹⁴ Should it be successfully implemented, this refreshing display of trust, goodwill and pragmatism will significantly boost regional connectivity: Nepalis and Bhutanese will have options other than India and Indian ports, a significant factor for Nepalis whose economy experienced unofficial Indian sanctions due to New Delhi’s dislike of Nepal’s new constitution; Indians in northeastern India will be

able to access Bangladesh's ports, roads and transport system. Thus, people in Tripura, one of the "seven sister" states located in far northeastern India,¹⁵ will now only have a 600-kilometer trip from Agartala to Kolkata via Bangladesh, rather than the 1,600 kilometer trip via India's Siliguri Corridor. In this remote but strategic area where all of the "seven sisters" have experienced insurgencies at various times, India's military forces crossed the Myanmar border in June 2015 to attack some Naga insurgents. Soon after, New Delhi concluded a peace agreement with one of the major Naga factions, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah). Concurrently, New Delhi is looking and "Acting East," including trying to gain land access to Southeast Asia via Myanmar. India's neglected northeast areas offer this geo-strategic opportunity. For their part, China and Myanmar also are engaging in a strategic contest for influence in this remote area where South, Southeast and Northeast Asia all meet. This part of South Asia bears watching.

One of the most obvious, and significant, changes in South Asia is the rise of India, with its 7.4 percent annual economic growth rate now possibly higher than China's (although China is ahead on most other economic measures).¹⁶ India needs high—and sustained—economic growth to overcome some of its serious developmental issues, such as pervasive poverty that afflicts 40 percent of its population, major deficiencies in health and hygiene, including 70 percent of Indians not having access to a proper latrine, and widespread malnutrition among about half the population. Nevertheless, economic growth is making India attractive to foreign nations who see trade and investment opportunities. Additionally, such growth is giving India strategic options, including financial largesse that can be employed to enhance India's position in South Asia, and beyond. Indeed, India's economic growth, along with its energetic prime minister, Narendra Modi, offers a locomotive for national and regional growth—provided that other South Asian nations are prepared to actively engage with India and provided that India and Pakistan can resolve their

vitriolic relationship. The former may happen if India can deal generously with its smaller neighbors. The latter will not happen at all, chiefly as Pakistan has become a “pariah” state for India.¹⁷ Furthermore, apart from Indian obduracy and Pakistan’s palpable unattractiveness, there is no domestic Indian constituency clamoring for India-Pakistan relations to be normalized. Nor is there a need, or imperative, for trade or closer economic cooperation: for decades, India and Pakistan have developed their respective nations while being physically and economically separated from each other. Pakistan also has not helped: Islamabad still has not granted India the “Most Favored Nation” status that would normalize their trade relations (and which it has granted China). Nevertheless, India’s disinterest in Pakistan is somewhat surprising as it would benefit significantly by normalizing relations with Pakistan, if only because, strategically, this might pry its enemy away from the embrace of another enemy, China. However, when India looks west, it only sees trouble and troubled Pakistan, which it chooses to look beyond, or over, to see Afghanistan or the energy-rich nations of Southwest or Central Asia. More pointedly, India’s diplomatic and economic focus has been eastwards, where New Delhi sees many opportunities: in Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Australasia, the Pacific Ocean, the Americas, etc. India’s other focus has been to the south, where the Indian Ocean beckons.

To South Asia’s south, a contest is increasingly arising in the Indian Ocean between the maritime forces of various nations, particularly those from China and India, but also from Pakistan. India is actively developing a “blue-water” navy endowed with aircraft carriers, a technology that India mastered years ago (unlike China). Pakistan is defending itself with what amounts to a “brown-water” navy. China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has a larger and superior capability to both India and Pakistan but, in relation to the Indian Ocean, China suffers from being non-contiguous.¹⁸ A major force multiplier for the navies of India and Pakistan is their projected acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines armed with nuclear

weapons deliverable by ballistic missiles. These significant capabilities will provide uncertainty, particularly for India, which has a difficult relationship with China. It is concerned about China's increasing role in, and with, Pakistan, including their naval developments and the possible use by Chinese shipping of Gwadar, a civil port built by China in far western Balochistan for Pakistan. Additionally, New Delhi is concerned about China's increasing maritime presence throughout the Indian Ocean, as evidenced by PLAN submarines visiting Colombo and Karachi in 2015, much to New Delhi's displeasure. Concurrently, China and India also are seeking "assets" or allies in this vast ocean. For China, this is partly to protect its vulnerable energy supply lines that stretch from the Persian Gulf to Northeast Asia, via the narrow Malacca Strait. For India, it is about countering Chinese expansionism and about never again being in a subordinate position in what, given the Indian Ocean's actual name, should be India's ocean. Western colonizers invaded India by sea, starting with the Portuguese in 1498. During the 1971 India-Pakistan war, the United States tried to intimidate India by sailing its Seventh Fleet into the Bay of Bengal. Given some Indians' infatuation with the name of "its" ocean, is it time to change the name of the Indian Ocean to something more general, such as the Central Ocean, the Inclusive Ocean or the Triple A Ocean (Africa, Asia, Australia)?

While India and China compete strategically, both nations have the maturity and ability to engage in other ways. Thus, despite their border and territorial disputes being unresolved, their two-way trade relationship is now worth \$71 billion, although the balance is very much in China's favor, which India would like to see remedied.¹⁹ However, India has concerns that China is seeking to make South Asia part of its greater region. Beijing is doing so through a number of initiatives. First, with neighboring Pakistan, China is developing the momentous China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), "a network of roads, railway and pipelines between the long-time allies ... [that] will run some 3,000 km (1,800 miles)" from Kashi (formerly

Kashgar), in western China, via disputed J&K, to Gwadar, in far south-western Pakistan.²⁰ CPEC forms part of China's "One Belt, One Road" strategy to establish trade and economic connections centered on China that follow both the old land-based "Silk Road" and a maritime equivalent. It will develop Pakistan—although it will be interesting to see how much Chinese "assistance" actually gets delivered, by whom, and in what form. (CPEC faces challenges. First, the project must traverse incredibly difficult and rugged mountainous terrain in northern J&K and Pakistan that is prone to earthquakes, landslides and regular periods of freezing-to-cold weather that hampers travel, closes roads due to snow and ice, and makes construction arduous. These factors will challenge the ingenuity, skill and deep pockets of engineers, logisticians and financiers. Second, CPEC is strategically vulnerable and politically sensitive, with New Delhi considering the disputed J&K territory through which it will traverse to be an "integral part of India." In the event of war, areas of J&K under Pakistan's administration would be highly vulnerable to Indian interdiction. Third, CPEC will go through politically sensitive regions with ethno-religious or separatist issues, particularly at the Balochistan end where Pakistan is yet to fully placate volatile and tenacious Balochi militants. A road would be the easiest option, as most of it already exists in the form of the Karakoram Highway—except that, in 2010, a landslide created a massive lake that submerged, and which, until recently, still covered, a part of this largely two-lane carriageway. Nevertheless, should CPEC ever be completed, not only will it enhance Pakistan, but also it will reduce China's "Malacca dilemma:" dependence on energy being transported through the strategic Malacca Strait. This waterway is important—and vulnerable—for China, as India possesses the strategic territory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands located near the strait's western entrance. Significantly, India is developing its first tri-service base at Port Blair, the capital of the Andaman and Nicobars.)

A second Chinese initiative involves encouraging South Asian nations to develop relations with China, partly because this is a good thing to do and partly to limit India's influence and strategic options. China has good material with which to work. Despite Modi improving most of India's relations regionally, India itself suffers from an "ugly Indian" image due to a hegemonic attitude and "big brother"-type actions, and from Indians being "boorish, condescending or overbearing."²¹ Pragmatically and not surprisingly, India's neighbors are keen to "hedge" their strategic "bets" by having good relations with—and extracting benefits from—both China and India. The possible exception is Bhutan, which has an open border with India and in which Indian currency is legal tender.²² Having relations with China also lessens India's strategic advantage of physically separating all South Asian nations, except Afghanistan and Pakistan. The reality, nevertheless, is that India lives in the neighborhood, while China is located nearby. Being practical, all South Asian nations, except Afghanistan, must necessarily have a relationship with India. Afghanistan chooses to have a relationship with India because, at the very least, it distrusts and dislikes Pakistan. Seemingly, China is currently doing better in South Asia than India. This is partly because of the greater largesse that China is offering. Nevertheless, India has significant "soft" power assets, such as its movie industry, particularly Bollywood, its culture, particularly the Ramayana, democracy, yoga, the use of English, sport, particularly cricket and hockey, and its diaspora. These might help to blunt China's influence if India can be unilaterally generous, both economically and diplomatically, with its neighbors. India's challenge is to sustain such an approach. It also needs to be patient: China's current attractiveness could (will?) change as China's largely self-interested activities, and its increasingly aggressive actions and the ramifications of these, become evident throughout Asia—and therefore unacceptable. That does not mean that India might suddenly usurp China in influence. Rather, all South Asian nations will need to be skilled at managing their relations with both behemoths.

A third Chinese initiative involves China establishing its own regional organizations and initiatives, with these not necessarily involving the United States. These include South Asian nations, with one of the big changes in the South Asia region being the desire of India and Pakistan to be involved in Chinese-led, U.S.-free organizations or strategic imperatives. First is the BRICS group comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Significantly, this brings China, India and Russia together in a way that may have once caused the U.S. strategic anxiety. Second is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that has seen China gain significant influence in Central Asia.²³ In a rare confluence of effort, India and Pakistan are seeking full SCO membership. (Both currently have observer-nation status.) SCO's "main goals ... are strengthening mutual confidence and good-neighborly relations among the member countries."²⁴ Given the paucity of trust and friendliness between India and Pakistan, their joint membership of SCO means that, if nothing else, both nations will at least be compelled to deal with each other on an annual basis—which is better than their current cursory or occasional basis. A third Chinese body is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), of which there are 57 prospective founding members, including six from South Asia: Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.²⁵ The United States has chosen not to join, although many of its allies have, including Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and the United Kingdom. The impact of the AIIB is yet to be seen. Certainly, managing such a diverse group of multilateral participants will pose challenges for Beijing. AIIB may offer borrowing opportunities for South Asian nations.

The final strategic development of significance to South Asia concerns energy. Currently low oil prices have given energy-hungry South Asian nations an unexpected economic and political bonus. Nevertheless, they all have increasing energy needs. Southwest Asia is the traditional source of much of South Asia's energy needs, although this may change. Hopefully, Iran will be re-joining the international community after successfully

reaching an agreement with the “P5 + 1” nations (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council: China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, plus Germany) to limit Iran’s nuclear activities. This offers strategic opportunities for India, in particular. Iran has significant oil and gas assets that could be transported to India via an under-sea pipeline and/or via the proposed, but lapsed, Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline,²⁶ for which Iran, nevertheless, apparently has constructed its part of IPI to the Pakistan border. A number of other proposed projects exist to transport energy to South Asia, with India often the final destination. These include: the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline; the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission project (CASA); the Indo-Bangladesh-Myanmar gas pipeline; and, schemes to send “hydel” (hydro-electricity) from Bhutan, Nepal or Myanmar to India. Apparently, India also has plans to sell surplus electricity to Pakistan. Significantly, these projects could bind the energy-deficient South Asia region together and assist regional economic development. Problematically, significant levels of mistrust need to be overcome among suppliers, transit nations and recipients. A particular challenge involves ensuring the stability of transit countries, with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Myanmar currently confronted by insurgents who could sever pipelines and transmission lines—as Balochis have done many times to an internal gas pipeline in Balochistan, Pakistan. This would make end users, particularly India, vulnerable to energy interdiction or boycott. Nations, particularly energy-dependent India, therefore need to develop a sustainable mix of hydel, hydrocarbons, nuclear, and renewable energy.

Trends and Possibilities

One obvious trend in South Asia is the increasing entrenchment of China and its interests throughout the region. The China-Pakistan connection is the most obvious and strongest manifestation of this trend. This relationship has slowly matured since 1963 to the point where both

nations consider each other “all-weather friends,” although Islamabad conveniently overlooks China’s lack of military support for Pakistan in its 1965, 1971 and 1999 wars with India. Similarly, Beijing has been concerned about Muslim Uighur insurgents from western Xinjiang, particularly the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), obtaining arms, training and sanctuary in Pakistan’s volatile Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). When Pakistan first befriended China, “Communist” China was distinctly unpopular internationally. In recent years, this situation has reversed, with some considering Pakistan to be an international “pariah” for supporting terrorism in India and Afghanistan.²⁷ Should ETIM become more active and powerful—which is a possibility as Xinjiang becomes more demographically and culturally Sinofied—this matter could become a serious irritant in the China-Pakistan relationship. Interestingly, should the Kashi-Gwadar corridor ever become functional, this will offer western Chinese, particularly Muslim Uighurs, options other than being tightly geo-economically involved with eastern China. Like all things strategic, China’s links with Pakistan are double-edged. Nevertheless, economically, Pakistan seemingly has “backed the right horse,” as Xi Jinping’s April visit and China’s \$46 billion investment package in Pakistan, which included the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, suggests. For some Pakistanis, CPEC is not just a “game changer,” but a “fate changer.” While significant, China’s money is not a gift. Ultimately, Pakistan will have to repay these Chinese loans or allow Chinese firms to make significant profits out of Pakistan and Pakistanis. Furthermore, Islamabad may ultimately come to realize—or be forced by disgruntled Pakistanis to realize—that China’s investments ultimately may benefit China, Chinese businesses and Chinese workers, far more than Pakistan and most Pakistanis. Nevertheless, given the diminished strategic worth of Pakistan in the post-ISAF climate and given its difficult relationship with India, Pakistan has few other options than to accept China’s investment package. No other nations are offering any such massive investment in Pakistan.

Apart from Pakistan, China is seeking to advance its relations with nations in or near South Asia, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Iran, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. China is seeking to access Afghanistan via the Wakhan Salient that borders western China and through which China may build a railway line to transport copper extracted from the large Chinese-controlled Aynak mine south of Kabul. Surprisingly, U.S.-China strategic and economic interests converge to some extent in Afghanistan, where China is happy to have the U.S. provide security, while the U.S. is happy to see China investing. As a result of China's alleged "String of Pearls" strategy to ingratiate itself throughout the Indian Ocean, China has obtained, or seeks to obtain, maritime access or military assets in strategic locations, including Bangladesh (Chittagong), Maldives (Marao Atoll), Myanmar (Sittwe), Pakistan (Gwadar), and Sri Lanka (Hambantota). Similarly, China is offering neighboring Bhutan and Nepal trade and transport opportunities, with one possibility being the extension of the existing Qinghai-Xizang railway line from Shigatse, south of Lhasa, to Kathmandu.²⁸ This would help Nepal to diversify its imports, particularly of oil, and to lessen its almost total dependency on India. Bhutan, which has a Treaty of Friendship with India dating from 1949 and which doesn't have official relations with China, will be a harder nut to crack. In Sri Lanka, China has been responsible for financing 70 percent of this nation's infrastructure projects, including the construction of Hambantota port and a new port facility near Colombo (although this financing has caused a debt problem for Colombo).²⁹ In the Maldives, the government has amended its constitution to allow the sale of freehold land to foreign nationals and entities, with the inference being that this will help the Chinese to purchase land there (although this change also will empower Indians and other nationals). China is providing finance to enable the construction of a bridge between the capital, Male, and the airport.³⁰ These actual and alleged Chinese moves displease India, despite any conciliatory diplomatic rhetoric from New Delhi to the contrary.

For its part, India may now feel that China is trying to encircle it and that it needs to break out from this encirclement. Although it lacks China's financial largesse, India is not without options. As noted, India's soft assets are significant, regionally and internationally. India also is seeking to spread its own largesse and influence. For instance, it has established a "World Hindi Secretariat in Mauritius" to "promote Hindi as an international language."³¹ This is not as silly as it seems: Mauritius has a large Indian diaspora, while there are some 20 million people of Indian extraction living in other parts of the world. Similarly, Bollywood films are exposing many people, particularly in South Asia, to Hindi. Diplomatically, Narendra Modi and his capable foreign minister, Sushma Swaraj, are slowly rectifying India's diplomacy that became moribund under Manmohan Singh's tired regime. They are re-engaging with the nations of India's region, particularly Bangladesh and post-election Sri Lanka—but not with pestiferous Pakistan. Strategically, India is getting closer to nations or entities near China, particularly Japan and Vietnam, but also Taiwan and the Philippines. It has an excellent relationship with the Association of South East Nations (ASEAN), with which India is a dialogue partner. It is involved in two other regional initiatives: the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which involves Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and the Ganga-Mekong Cooperation with Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Strategically, India may also have overseas bases, including "Ainee in Tajikistan and Nha Trang in Vietnam; with promised access to Subic Bay and Clark Air Base in the Philippines, the Agaléga Islands in Mauritius, Chabahar in Iran, and a naval base in northern Mozambique."³² Militarily, Modi and his sometimes provocative defence minister, Manohar Parrikar, are trying to revitalize India's sluggish or inefficient defence industry, to get co-productions of significant defence materiel built in India as part of the government's "Make in India" initiative, and to re-equip India's military with modern weapons and capabilities. A pressing issue is

to provide the military with adequate supplies of ammunition.³³ There is much to be done.

India also has futuristic plans to build or participate in various transport, energy and economic corridors. These include: transport routes eastwards, via Myanmar, to Southeast Asia, and to China, via the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor; an underwater Indian Ocean energy pipeline to Oman that possibly would extend to, and take energy from, Iran and Turkmenistan; and, the so-called “International North-South Transport Corridor” (INSTC) to, and through, Iran. INSTC comprises “a multi-modal trade transport network that includes rail, road, and water transport from Mumbai in India via Bandar Abbas in Iran to Moscow in Russia,” and possible connectivity to Turkey and Eastern Europe.³⁴ A further Indian route that is supposed to be operational in December 2016 goes from Chabahar, Iran, to Afghanistan, and beyond to Central Asia.³⁵ This will enable India to access Afghanistan without having to deal with troubled Pakistan and its rugged northwestern terrain and difficult mountain passes inhabited in parts by actively anti-social Taliban. The Chabahar route also offers landlocked Afghanistan and the Central Asian “stans” another option other than being reliant on Pakistan or Russia. This route is now feasible, given the recent agreement between Iran and the P5 + 1 nations. Additionally, India has suggested that the TAPI gas pipeline be routed through Iran, thus bypassing politically unstable Afghanistan and Pakistan.³⁶ Like China, India is thinking creatively about its strategic and economic options and its regional transport possibilities, although how many of these actually come to fruition remains to be seen.

A further major change in India’s strategic outlook is its enhanced relations with the United States. Before 1991, India had a difficult relationship with the U.S. This partly resulted from India’s strong adherence to *swaraj* (self rule, or being free from foreign dominance) and non-alignment—now

called strategic autonomy or multi-bilateralism (my term)—by which India supposedly has pursued an independent foreign policy and to which the U.S. was averse. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, India-US interests have slowly converged, with relations improving to the point where both nations now enjoy a strategic partnership and an “indispensable relationship.”³⁷ Obvious aspects of improved relations include President Obama’s attendance as chief guest at India’s Republic Day celebrations on January 26, 2015, the first U.S. president to be so honored, and Prime Minister Modi’s “rock star” treatment in New York in September 2014. More substantial aspects include U.S. arms sales to India, with India now the U.S.’s largest arms customer,³⁸ and joint military exchanges, with the U.S. now India’s leading exercise partner.³⁹ Destabilizing irritants have been the fallout over the treatment of the U.S.-based female Indian diplomat, Devyani Khobragade, in early 2014, and U.S. arms sales of aircraft, attack helicopters, missiles and other equipment for counter terrorism operations to Pakistan, which Washington considers will not alter the military balance, but which Pakistan could, of course, use against India. Many Americans also find New Delhi’s decision-making processes sluggish, even moribund, plus they want India to agree to an alliance with the U.S. Part of India’s decision-making hesitancy comes from a simple human resources issue: India does not have enough diplomats. India’s Ministry of External Affairs has a total of 2,042 “Posts at Hqrs [Headquarters]” and 1,982 “Posts at Missions” abroad, for a “Total” of 4,024 officers.⁴⁰ By comparison, the United States Foreign Service “...is a corps of some 13,000 employees.”⁴¹

Nevertheless, the India-U.S. relationship is getting stronger—and will continue to do so. This results from a simple joint strategic convergence: both nations’ increasing concern about a rising, and increasingly assertive, China. For India, its northern neighbor is a serious strategic, military and economic rival with which India has an unresolved border and territorial dispute, an increasing maritime rivalry in the Indian Ocean, and concerns lest China’s “all-weather” friendship with Pakistan result in India eventually

needing to fight a two-front war, with this conflict possibly involving the use of nuclear weapons. For the U.S., China is acting increasingly assertively in the western Pacific Ocean where the U.S. has major strategic interests, military assets, and treaty commitments, including with the Philippines and Taiwan.

India is realistic about China, which it knows is—like India itself—an incomplete power confronting significant developmental, diplomatic and political problems. China's problems include: territorial issues in the South China Sea; the need to defend fourteen land borders; reunification with Taiwan; unresolved borders with Bhutan, India, Nepal and North Korea; an aging population; gender imbalance; inefficient state industries; and, disgruntled minorities, particularly in Xizang and Xinjiang. Partly because of these shortcomings, China is advancing its strategic issues slowly, except seemingly in the South China Sea. This makes its actions not yet sufficiently obdurate or threatening to compel India and the U.S. to move to form a strategic alliance. Consequently, India-U.S. relations will continue to improve, but they will not move to the level of an alliance. Put simply, while the U.S. might like or want India to be a U.S. ally, India does not yet want, or need, this.

Conclusion

Despite envisaging new external possibilities, India's biggest challenge remains Pakistan, about which New Delhi has a decisive blind spot and a lack of imagination. Overall, the India-Pakistan relationship is exceedingly poor. It is riddled with mistrust, militarism, missed opportunities and even misanthropy, at times. It is far from normal. And while India and Pakistan have developed since 1947 despite having hostile relations and being devoid of significant socio-economic relations, India would benefit strategically, militarily and economically by normalizing this relationship—as would Pakistan. Certainly, if India wants to become a great power, it needs to remedy its relationship with its western neighbor, if only because China,

adopting the maxim that “my enemy’s enemy is my friend,” clearly benefits from India-Pakistan hostility. A “correction” is possible, if only because India and Pakistan have so much in common. Things also can change quickly on the subcontinent: consider Pakistan’s “loss” of Bangladesh in 1971, or Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984, or Sri Lanka’s somewhat surprising, but positive, presidential and general election outcomes in 2015. Indeed, given the right set of circumstances, the India-Pakistan and/or China-India relationships could normalize very quickly. This would require the existence of politically powerful leaders in both nations who trust each other, who have leadership and charisma, and who enjoy strong political or popular support. A traumatic event that impacts on both nations, such as a devastating natural calamity or an attack by a third party, would also boost any normalization process. Currently, such circumstances do not exist. Despite Narendra Modi’s popularity and energy, he is, at best, opportunistic and, at worst, reticent, about Pakistan, as is his party and government. In Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif is politically weak. Serious anti-government protests in 2014 led by his political opponents, Imran Khan and Tahir-ul-Qadri, weakened Sharif. Indeed, they compelled him to grant the Pakistan Army a veto on major strategic matters—Afghanistan, India and nuclear arms—in return for the military’s physical protection of both the capital city and Pakistan’s incumbent politicians who operate there. Pointedly, however, the Pakistan Army needs Pakistan to have an adverse relationship with India in order to justify its existence, expenditure and enterprises—a situation that impairs the normalization of India-Pakistan relations. These dynamics are unlikely to change in the short term, particularly on the Pakistan side.⁴²

For a number of reasons, China-India relations have more potential to improve in future. Modi and Xi are active international participants. Both are in strong political positions—although Modi’s government is legislatively constrained due to not controlling India’s *Rajya Sabha* (Council of States, the upper house of the Parliament of India) and by its inability

to do deals with its political opponents. As the Rajya Sabha situation is unlikely to change in the short term, the government will be furthered challenged both legislatively and in terms of its popularity. In other words, Mr Modi's political "honeymoon" is now well and truly over, as his party's major loss in the 2015 Bihar elections confirmed. However, both leaders are creative strategic thinkers, as shown by Modi's ability to fix the longstanding Bangladesh-India enclave issue and Xi's meeting with Taiwan's former President Ma Ying-Jeou. (While this meeting reflected China's need to ease some of its eastern strategic burdens, given the right set of circumstances, China and Taiwan also could quickly reunify.) Additionally, both China and India would benefit from better relations. China gets little from its involvement with Pakistan, except Indian (and Afghan) angst and Pakistani dependency. It also needs stability while matters are resolved in the South China Sea—as much as possible on China's (assertive) terms, is Beijing's desire. India also needs stability to develop economically. It would prefer cooperation with China to competition, which is possible given both nations' abilities to deal with strategic complexity. A precedent also suggests that they could quickly normalize their relations: in 1972, Richard Nixon met Mao Zedong in Beijing after which inimical China-U.S. relations rapidly normalized. Should China and India resolve their differences and normalize relations, their biggest challenge thereafter would be managing other nations' anxieties and expectations, particularly in relation to an insecure Pakistan. This is not a zero-sum equation, however. Improved China-India relations could also lead to better India-Pakistan relations. Indeed, an opportunity exists for Pakistan to help China and India to bridge their gap.

In terms of South Asia generally, one thing is currently certain: diplomatically and strategically, China has the nations in this region, including India and Pakistan, where it wants them—although they don't yet appear to realize it. Pakistan is pliant and increasingly dependent on

China; India is struggling to effectively compete with China; other South Asian nations, while ostensibly hedging, are seeking better diplomatic and economic relations with China, invariably on China's terms. Given this situation, plus China's obvious strategic and military drive and financial largesse, it is China's star overall that is rising in South Asia (and also in Central Asia). The challenge for China is to ensure that its improving position benefits all nations and people concerned, not just China and the Chinese. Conversely, the challenge for all South Asian nations is to prevent China from encircling and excessively exploiting them. To avoid this, they need to develop their nations and diversify their relations. One way to achieve both would be to develop South Asia into a strong, economically-unified region. To achieve this, the nations of South Asia need to move beyond mistrust and old paradigms and engage with each other in meaningful and mutually-beneficial ways. This remains the region's greatest challenge.

Appendix 2: The Nations of South Asia

Nation	Area	Pop.	System of govt.	GDP (ppp)	GDP/head (ppp)	Ec growth	Main ethnicities	Lit.	Religions
Afghanistan	652,230	33 million	Democracy	\$61 billion	\$1,900	1.5%	Pashtun, Tajik, others	38%	99% Islam
Bangladesh	148,460	169 million	Democracy	\$534 billion	\$3,400	6.1%	Bengalis	62%	89% Muslim; 10% Hindu
Bhutan	38,394	742,000	Democracy	\$5.9 billion	\$7,600	6.4%	Bhutanese, Nepali	65%	75% Buddhist; 22% Hindu
India	3,287,263	1.24 billion	Democracy	\$7.376 trillion	\$5,900	7.2% (10.1% 2010)	Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Mongoloid	71%	80% Hindu; 14% Islam; 6% Sikh, Christian, others
Maldives	298	393,000	Democracy	\$4.9 billion	\$14,400	5%	South Indians, Sinhalese, Arabs	99%	100% Sunni Islam
Nepal	147,181	32 million	Democracy	\$67 billion	\$2,400	5.5%	125 different caste/ethnic groups in 2011 national census	64%	81% Hindu; 9% Buddhist; 8% others
Pakistan	796,095	199 million	Democracy	\$882 billion	\$4,700	4.1%	Punjabi, Sindhis, Pakhtoon, others	58%	96.4% Islam; 3.6% Hindu, Christian, others
Sri Lanka	65,610	22 million	Democracy	\$217 billion	\$10,400	7.4%	Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors, Indian Tamils	93%	70% Buddhist; 12.2% Hindu; 9.7% Muslim; 7.4% Christian

Adjacent nations or entities with which South Asia has land borders:

Nation	Area	Pop.	System of govt.	GDP (ppp)	GDP/head (ppp)	Ec growth	Main ethnicities	Lit.	Religions
China*	9,596,960	1.367 billion	One party state	\$17.62 trillion	\$12,900	7.4%	91% Han; 56 other ethnic groups	96%	Officially atheist; Buddhist 18%; folk religion 22%
Iran	1,648,195	82 million	Theocratic Republic	\$1.33 trillion	\$17,100	3%	Persian, Azeri, Kurd, Others	87%	99% Muslim
Myanmar	676,578	56 million	Democracy?	\$242 billion	\$4,700	7.7%	Burman, Shan, Karen, Rakhine, other	93%	89% Buddhist; 4% Christian 4% Muslim

*: does not include Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan

British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT):

Nation	Area	Pop.	System of govt.	GDP (ppp)	GDP/head (ppp)	Ec growth	Main ethnicities	Lit.	Religions
BIOT		60 3,000 UK, US military	UK territory leased to US				[Displaced Chagosian]		

Sources:

Most figures are estimated for 2014. All figures obtained from Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, various nations, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> [accessed 13 September 2015]

Key:

Area: square kilometres (sq. km; one square mile equals approximately 2.6 sq. km)

Ec: Economic

Govt.: Government

Lit.: Literacy rate: age 15 and over who can read and write

Pop.: Population ppp: purchasing power parity, estimated, in US dollars

UK: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

US: United States

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